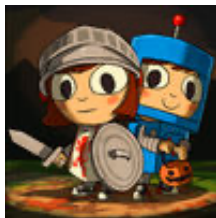


RPG Reload File 012 – 'Costume Quest'

[October 30, 2014](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)



Hello, gentle readers, and welcome to the **RPG Reload**, the weekly feature where we put metaphorical cardboard boxes on our heads and pretend we're knights. Each week, we play an RPG from the App Store's past to do a little deep diving. It's a chance to revisit and reflect on some great games from years gone by, and an opportunity to expand beyond the usual scope of our reviews here at TouchArcade. Like a particularly cunning trick-or-treater, I've carefully planned my schedule, so as to cover a wide variety of RPGs, but if you guys know of any houses that are handing out full-size Snickers bars, fess up! Drop a comment down below or post in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#) in the forums to vote for which RPG you'd like to see me write about. Once per month, the majority rules, and I will carry out the tragic work of playing that awesome game. The next reader's choice article is next week, and the winner this time is *Baldur's Gate* [\(\\$9.99\)](#)! Any votes made from now will go towards the following reader's choice, which will take place in **RPG Reload File 017** at the beginning of December.

This week wraps up the **RPG Reload**'s month of Hallowe'en celebrations, and it's ending the only way it really could. *Costume Quest* [\(Free\)](#), from Double Fine Productions, isn't the greatest RPG by any means, but it is without a doubt the ultimate Hallowe'en RPG, so it's little wonder that I've run through the game start to finish every October since its 2010 launch. For iOS gamers, however, this is only the second year that's possible, with the game making its way to the platform just over a year ago in September 2013. As

I've mentioned before, I love Hallowe'en, and while I could list off reasons all day as to why that is, it has its roots in something many of us share: childhood memories of dressing up in various costumes and scouring the neighborhood (and beyond!) for a whopping pile of candy the likes of which I could only see once per year. My favorite years were those after my parents stopped accompanying me and my friends and I were free to chart our course as we liked. It was like a huge, crazy adventure where you pretend to be someone else, team up with others, and explore areas thoroughly in pursuit of loot. For me, *Costume Quest* recaptures that feeling almost perfectly.



The story behind *Costume Quest's* development is an interesting one. While in the midst of working on the ill-fated *Brutal Legend*, special two-week breathers of sorts were held at Double Fine. The team would break into four smaller teams and spend their time working on prototypes for future games. One of those concepts was what would become *Costume Quest*. After *Brutal Legend* underperformed in sales, Double Fine was left without anything to work on, so they went back to the ideas that had been brainstormed in that session to flesh them out as proper finished products. *Costume Quest*

caught the eye of now-defunct publisher THQ, who published it on PSN and Xbox Live Arcade in late October, 2010. The game was developed in about one year by a relatively small team led by Tasha Harris, then Double Fine's lead animator and currently the lead franchise artist at Pixar. It was a concept Harris had wanted to bring to life for a long time, and influenced by games like *EarthBound*, *Dragon Quest* ([\\$2.99](#)), and *The Legend Of Zelda*, she decided to shape that idea into something that was a mix of RPG and adventure game elements.

With its relatively low budget and moderate financial success, *Costume Quest* ended up being the first significant step towards Double Fine's future of developing smaller-scale digital titles instead of big AAA retail products. It's a strategy that has paid off for a developer that seemed to be running out of straws to grasp in an increasingly challenging market. Its significance to the company may be one of the reasons why *Costume Quest* is the first and, so far, only Double Fine game to get a sequel, the recently-released *Costume Quest 2*. There's no sign yet of the sequel making its way to iOS, but given the length of time it took the original to make the jump to mobiles, there's no point getting up in arms about it at this juncture. Even if it doesn't, we've still got the original, and let's be real, is anyone particularly broken up about there not being an *It's The Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown 2*?



The game follows the story of Reynold and Wren, twins who have just moved to town and have yet to make any friends. It's Hallowe'en night and they're stuck trick-or-treating with each other. You'll take control of one of the pair, while the other will be kidnapped by monsters soon after the start of the game. The game handles your choice of which you want to play as in a natural and somewhat funny way. The twins are fighting over who gets to be in charge, and you control who their father's finger is pointing at to settle the argument. The one he points at will be the hero, the other will be the victim. The only difference between the two is cosmetic, so it's really just whether you'd prefer to play as a boy or girl. After their sibling is captured by monsters, Reynold or Wren will set out to rescue them on their own, because if they tell mom and dad, they'll really be in trouble. Ah, the logic of children. Their journey will take them to three main areas of town: the neighborhood, the shopping mall, and the fairgrounds. Along the way, new friends are met, new costumes are found, and a whole lot of candy is collected.

Costume Quest is a pretty short game, and every year, I seem to forget just how short it is. The game almost necessarily wraps up within six hours or so, and it goes even faster once you've been through it and know where

everything is. This felt like a weakness the first time I played it, but as a yearly event, its brevity is among its strengths. This is something you can easily fit into your yearly Hallowe'en schedule, while a longer game might be too bothersome. It's not particularly difficult, though some battles can go very badly for you if you're not good at hitting the various QTEs that come up. Even if you are skilled at those, certain combinations of monsters can, with luck, take you down if they gang up on one character. While the three main areas of the game are fairly large, they're small enough that it's hard to get lost or stumped, especially once you've gotten used to the various exploration powers at your disposal and what they can and can't do. If you run into an obstacle and the game doesn't clearly spell out the answer, you just have to ask if any of your costumes can overcome it. If not, you need to be looking for a new costume.



In terms of gameplay, the costumes are the main motivators and stars of the show here. Just about every costume in the game has to be assembled piece by piece, with the parts strewn about the area. Gaining a new costume might not only open the path ahead, it also gives you a new toy to play with in battle. I absolutely love the way *Costume Quest* handles its battles. When

you're roaming around on the map, your costume looks like the kind of cheap thing a kid would put together with scraps from around the house, but the minute a battle starts, your homemade costume comes to life, transforming the child into the exact picture they likely had in their imagination. The game only vaguely draws attention to this outside of the fights, leaving it up to your interpretation as to whether or not the battles are really happening the way we see them play out. I can't think of a better way to present a bunch of kids in cardboard suits battling evil goblins.

The actual nuts and bolts of the battles are a bit contentious. They're very simple in structure, with a turn-based approach and a whopping two commands to choose from, one of which can only be used every three turns at best. Each costume has a basic attack and a special attack that needs to be powered up to use. When special attacks are ready, you can just fire them off and they'll do things like attack all on-screen enemies or heal your party. Basic attacks are a bit more involved, requiring you to pass a quick time event to do the most damage. On the iOS version, this involves things like tapping the right button just as a gauge reaches a certain point, or swiping across the screen as fast as possible. Additionally, when the enemies attack, you will be prompted to touch one of the four colored buttons that appear on the screen to reduce the amount of damage done. For most battles, it doesn't matter whether or not you can nail these consistently, but there are a few fights where you pretty much have to hit all of them to pull out a victory. Battles are at least generally quite short, only lasting a few turns, but if you don't like quick time events, you're going to have a bad time with *Costume Quest's* fights. Even if you don't mind those actions, the limited strategy involved makes the battles feel repetitive well before they really should.



Luckily, the new costumes come at a regular pace and the game itself is fairly short, so it never gets to the point where you just want to stop, but the battles are definitely a novelty that lose their shine by the time the game is done. The parts outside of the battles, on the other hand, are enjoyable all the way through. One of the main goals in each area is to trick-or-treat every house or store, which is such an essential part of Hallowe'en that I'm thrilled they found a way to work it in. Each place you trick-or-treat will yield either a battle or a bunch of candy. Candy is the game's currency, and it makes perfect sense given that everyone you're doing trade with is a fellow child. You can use your candy to buy battle stamps that give various benefits in battle when you slap them on your costume. You'll earn it from battles, houses, and treasure coffins, but you can also get a piece from hitting just about anything in the game's environment. It's a satisfying way to busy yourself during downtimes. The other main collectible items are Creepy Treats trading cards, kind of a take-off of Garbage Pail Kids cards. These are purely for the sake of collecting, but it's a fun extra to watch out for as you play.

Trick-or-treating every place will remove your main barrier to progression,

but there are lots of other side areas and obstacles tucked into each location where you will need to make use of the abilities of specific costumes. The knight costume's shield will help you pass through places with falling water or get near trees with vicious squirrels in them, while the ninja is able to use a sneak ability to stealthily slip past enemies. Some of the costumes have no special ability outside of battle, however. You'll need to swap costumes around fairly frequently, but the UI anticipates this, so it's pretty fast and easy to do so in principle. I say "in principle" because the user interface has a lot of problems all around in the iOS version, but I'll get to that in a little bit. Aside from monsters popping out of houses, you'll sometimes see them roaming around. If you can sneak behind them and give them a whack with your bag, you'll start off the battle by doing a bit of damage to every enemy, which is a nice leg up. Each location also offers an apple-bobbing mini-game where you can win a bunch of candy and some Creepy Treats cards if you're able to get a high enough score. You can also search out some kids who are playing hide and seek to earn a nice prize. Otherwise, it's a lot of fetch-questing, finding this thing for that person so they'll let you access an area you need to go to. It's not the most thrilling stuff, but the theme easily carries it for the length of the game.



The careful attention to capturing the Hallowe'en spirit is the main thing that makes *Costume Quest* stand out, but it's more than enough. The game also has a really good sense of humor to it, as you would expect from Double Fine. It's very kid-friendly humor, but it rings so true to reality that you can't help but smile at most of it. The presentation also does an excellent job of being faithful to those childhood memories. It's the right synthesis of cute and spooky, echoing the very odd mix that makes up Hallowe'en for kids. The kids have big heads and very expressive faces, which allows them to express quite a range of emotions for such simple models. That's important because although the main event here is Hallowe'en, *Costume Quest* also lightly touches on themes of family and friendship. There's a certain adult absenteeism here that immediately calls to mind the world of Charlie Brown and the *Peanuts* gang. Adults exist in the world of *Costume Quest*, but they are totally clueless and not even remotely helpful. They just don't understand what's *really* going on, you know?

As to the iOS version of the game, it seems to suffer from a pretty common malady of console developers inexperienced with the platform. Instead of doing the intuitive thing and giving us a virtual joystick, you have to tap

where you want the kids to move to. This is fine on its own, but you also have to tap a little icon to interact with objects in the environment, which you'll be doing fairly often as you search for candy. Even that's not so bad, but tapping on the kids will bring up the screen to change costumes, and this is where things can get irritating. Say you've tapped in close to an object wanting to interact with it, and now you're trying to tap the little icon above it to use it. Perhaps you need to move just a bit closer. Well, your finger is now near enough to the kids that you're going to accidentally bring up that costume switching screen a lot. The game was designed around a stick and a few buttons, and it would have been really nice if the developer had at least allowed us to use a virtual representation as an option. I'd also like to see MFi controller support while I'm making wishes. Other than that, the app holds up nicely. It supports 4-inch screens and iCloud, and it even got a few bug fix updates shortly after its release. I'm not sure if we'll see anything further, but it all works fine at the moment, so no foul.



This was actually my first time playing through the iOS version of the game, and apart from the controls being easier in battle and more irritating outside of it, I got pretty much the same experience as usual from *Costume Quest*,

just in a format easier to play after my wife's gone to sleep. I'm not sure if I'll ever tire of playing this when October rolls around, but this is the fifth year and I still get a dumb grin on my face as I knock on those neighborhood doors seeking candy and adventure. The game is well worth it even at its full asking price, but it almost always goes on sale around Hallowe'en, and if you're reading this at the time the article is published, you probably still have a day or two to catch it for half-price. What about the add-on, *Grubbins On Ice*, you ask? Stop trying to open your presents early, friends! If you have any love for Hallowe'en at all, any shred of nostalgia for trick-or-treating, I can't think of a better RPG to call on than *Costume Quest*.

That's just what I think, though. I want to know what you think about *Costume Quest*. You can share your thoughts in the comments section below or in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#). Heck, if you even want to share a Hallowe'en story, I'm all for it. Don't forget to throw in your vote for the December reader's choice feature while you're at it. As for me, I'll be back next week to talk about the latest selection from you fine people, *Baldur's Gate*. It's kicking off a month that I'm unofficially referring to as 'Origins Month'. Exciting *and* mysterious, right? Anyway, I hope you all have a happy and safe Hallowe'en, and as ever, thanks for reading!

Next Week's Reload Hint: *You Asked For It, It's Baldur's Gate!*